Fred Rogers

Fred McFeely Rogers (March 20, 1928 – February 27, 2003) was an American television personality, musician, puppeteer, writer, producer, and Presbyterian minister. He was the creator, showrunner and host of the preschool television series *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, which ran from 1968 to 2001.

Born in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, near Pittsburgh, Rogers earned a bachelor's degree in music from Rollins College in 1951. He began his television career in 1951 at NBC in New York. He returned to Pittsburgh in 1953 to work for children's programming at NET (later PBS) television station WQED. After graduating from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, he became a Presbyterian minister in 1963 and attended the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Child Development, where he began his 30-year long collaboration with child psychologist Margaret McFarland. He also helped develop the children's shows *The Children's Corner* (1955) and *Misterogers* (1963). In 1968 he created *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, which ran for 33 years. The program was critically acclaimed for focusing on children's emotional and physical concerns, such as death, sibling rivalry, school enrollment, and divorce.

Rogers died of stomach cancer on February 27, 2003 at the age of 74. His work in children's television has been widely lauded, and he received over 40 honorary degrees and several awards, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2002 and a Lifetime Achievement Emmy in 1997. He was inducted into the Television Hall of Fame in 1999. Rogers influenced many writers and producers of children's television shows, and his broadcasts have served as a source of comfort during tragic events, even after his death.

The Reverend
Fred Rogers

Rogers on the set of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* in the late 1960s

Born	Fred McFeely Rogers March 20, 1928 Latrobe, Pennsylvania, U.S.
Died	February 27, 2003 (aged 74) Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S.
Other names	Mister Rogers
Alma mater	Rollins College (BA) Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (MDiv)
Occupation	Children's television presenter, actor, puppeteer, singer, composer, television producer, author, educator, Presbyterian minister
Years active	1951–2001
Spouse(s)	

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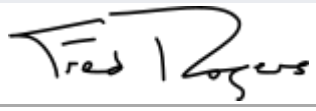
Pennsylvania Historical Marker	
Official name	Fred McFeely Rogers (1928–2003)
Type	Roadside
Designated	June 25, 2016

Signature



Early life

Main Street, Latrobe, Pennsylvania, Rogers' birthplace

Rogers was born on March 20, 1928 in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, about 40 miles (64 km) outside of Pittsburgh, at 705 Main Street[1] to James and Nancy Rogers. James was "a very successful businessman"[2] who was president of the McFeely Brick Company, one of Latrobe's largest businesses. Nancy's father, Fred Brooks McFeely, after whom Rogers was named, was an entrepreneur.[3] Nancy knitted sweaters for American soldiers from western Pennsylvania who were fighting in Europe and regularly volunteered at the Latrobe Hospital. Initially dreaming of becoming a doctor, she settled for a life of hospital volunteer work. Rogers grew up in a three-story brick mansion at 737 Weldon Street in Latrobe.[4][1] He had a sister, Elaine, whom the Rogerses adopted when he was 11 years old.[4] Rogers spent much of his childhood alone, playing with puppets, and also spent time with his grandfather. He began to play the piano when he was five years old.[5] Through an ancestor from Schöneck, Hesse, Germany, Johannes Meffert (1732–1795), later Johannes Mefford, Rogers is the sixth cousin of American actor Tom Hanks, who portrays him in the film *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood* (2019).[6]

Rogers had a difficult childhood. He was shy, introverted, and overweight, and was frequently homebound after suffering bouts of asthma.[2] He was bullied and taunted as a child for his weight, and called "Fat Freddy".[7] According to Morgan Neville, director of the 2018 documentary *Won't You Be My Neighbor?*, Rogers had a "lonely childhood ... I think he made friends with himself as much as he could. He had a ventriloquist dummy, he had [stuffed] animals, and he would create his own worlds in his childhood bedroom".[7]

Rogers attended Latrobe High School, where he overcame his shyness.[8] "It was tough for me at the beginning," Rogers told NPR's Terry Gross in 1984. "And then I made a couple friends who found out that the core of me was okay. And one of them was ... the head of the football team".[9] Rogers served as president of the student council, was a member of the National Honor Society and was editor-in-chief of the school yearbook.[8] He attended Dartmouth College for one year before transferring to Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida; he graduated *magna cum laude*[3] in 1951 with a degree in music composition.[5]

Rogers in 1946 as a high school senior

Rogers graduated from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and was ordained a minister of the United Presbyterian Church in 1963.[10] His mission as an ordained minister, instead of being a pastor of a church, was to minister to children and their families through television. He regularly appeared before church officials to keep up his ordination.[11]

Career

External audio

Terry Gross and Fred Rogers (https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1178498), *Fresh Air with Terry Gross*[12]

Early work

Rogers wanted to enter seminary after college,[13] but instead chose to go into television after encountering a TV at his parents' home in 1951 during his senior year at Rollins College.[14] In a CNN interview, he said, "I went into television because I hated it so, and I thought there's some way of using this fabulous instrument to nurture those who would watch and listen".[15][note 1] After graduating in 1951, he worked at NBC in New York City as floor director of *Your Hit Parade*, *The Kate Smith Hour*, and Gabby Hayes's children's show, and as an assistant producer of *The Voice of Firestone*.[18][19][20]

WQED headquarters in Pittsburgh

In 1953, Rogers returned to Pittsburgh to work as a program developer at public television station WQED. Josie Carey worked with him to develop the children's show *The Children's Corner*, which Carey hosted. Rogers worked off-camera to develop puppets, characters, and music for the show. He used many of the puppet characters developed during this time, such as Daniel the Striped Tiger (named after WQED's station manager, Dorothy Daniel, who gave Rogers a tiger puppet before the show's premiere),[21] King Friday XIII, Queen Sara Saturday (named after Rogers' wife),[22] X the Owl, Henrietta, and Lady Elaine, in his later work.[23][24] Children's television entertainer Ernie Coombs was an assistant puppeteer.[25] *The Children's Corner* won a Sylvania Award for best locally produced children's programming in 1955 and was broadcast nationally on NBC.[26][27][28] While working on *The Children's Corner*, Rogers attended Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and was ordained as a Presbyterian minister in 1963. He also attended the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Child Development,[29][28] where he began working with child psychologist Margaret McFarland, who according to Rogers biographer Maxwell King became his "key advisor and collaborator" and "child-

education guru".[30] Much of Rogers' "thinking about and appreciation for children was shaped and informed" by McFarland.[29] She was his consultant for most of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*'s scripts and songs for 30 years.[30]

In 1963, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in Toronto contracted Rogers to develop and host the 15-minute black-and-white children's program *Misterogers;* it lasted from 1963 to 1967.[25][31] It was the first time Rogers appeared on camera. CBC's children's programming head Fred Rainsberry insisted on it, telling Rogers, "Fred, I've seen you talk with kids. Let's put you yourself on the air".[32] Coombs joined Rogers in Toronto as an assistant puppeteer.[25] Rogers also worked with Coombs on the children's show *Butternut Square* from 1964 to 1967. He acquired the rights to *Misterogers* in 1967 and returned to Pittsburgh with his wife, two young sons, and the sets he developed, despite a potentially promising career with CBC and no job prospects in Pittsburgh.[33][34] Coombs remained in Toronto, creating the long-running children's program *Mr. Dressup*, which ran from 1967 to 1996.[35] Rogers' work for CBC "helped shape and develop the concept and style of his later program for the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in the U.S."[36]

Mister Rogers' Neighborhood

Rogers screens the tape replay with Betty Aberlin and Johnny Costa in 1969.

Mister Rogers' Neighborhood (also called the *Neighborhood*), a half-hour educational children's program starring Rogers, began airing nationally in 1968 and ran for 895 episodes.[37] The program was videotaped at WQED in Pittsburgh and was broadcast by National Educational Television (NET), which later became the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS).[38][39] Its first season had 180 black-and-white episodes. Each subsequent season, filmed in color and funded by PBS, the Sears-Roebuck Foundation, and other charities, consisted of 65 episodes.[40][41] By the time the program ended production in December 2000, its average rating was about .7 percent of television households, or 680,000 homes, and it aired on 384 PBS stations. At its peak in 1985–1986, its ratings were at 2.1 percent, or 1.8 million homes.[42][43] Production of the *Neighborhood* ended in December 2000, and the last original episode aired in 2001, but PBS continued to air reruns; by 2016 it was the third-longest running program in PBS history.[41][44]

Many of the sets and props in *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, like the trolley, the sneakers, and the castle, were created for Rogers' show in Toronto by CBC designers and producers. The program also "incorporated most of the highly imaginative elements that later became famous",[45] such as its slow pace and its host's quiet manner.[46][45] The format of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* "remained virtually unchanged" for the entire run of the program.[47] Every episode begins with a camera's-eye view of a model of a neighborhood, then panning in closer to a representation of a house while a piano instrumental of the theme song, "Won't You be My Neighbor?", by music director Johnny Costa and inspired by a Beethoven sonata, is played.[48] The camera zooms in to a model representing Mr. Rogers' house, then cuts to the house's interior and pans across the room to the front door, which Rogers opens as he sings the theme song to greet his visitors while changing his suit jacket to a cardigan (knitted by his mother)[49] and his dress shoes to sneakers, "complete with a shoe tossed from one hand to another".[50]

Neighborhood Trolley from *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* set at WQED studios in Pittsburgh

The episode's theme is introduced, and Mr. Rogers leaves his home to visit another location, the camera panning back to the neighborhood model and zooming in to the new location as he enters it. Once this segment ends, Mr. Rogers leaves and returns to his home, indicating that it is time to visit the Neighborhood of Make-Believe. Mr. Rogers proceeds to the window seat by the trolley track and sets up the action there as the Trolley comes out. The camera follows it down a tunnel in the back wall of the house as it enters the Neighborhood of Make-Believe. The stories and lessons told take place over a series of a week's worth of episodes and involve puppet and human characters. The end of the visit occurs when the Trolley returns to the same tunnel from which it emerged, reappearing in Mr. Rogers' home. He then talks to the viewers before concluding the episode. He often feeds his fish, cleans up any props he has used, and returns to the front room, where he sings the closing song while changing back into his dress shoes and jacket. He exits the front door as he ends the song, and the camera zooms out of his home and pans across the neighborhood model as the episode ends.[note 2]

A sweater worn by Rogers, on display in the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of American History

Mister Rogers' Neighborhood emphasized young children's social and emotional needs, and unlike another PBS show, *Sesame Street*, which premiered in 1969, did not focus on cognitive learning.[51] Writer Kathy Merlock Jackson said, "While both shows target the same preschool audience and prepare children for kindergarten, *Sesame Street* concentrates on school-readiness skills while *Mister Rogers Neighborhood* focuses on the child's developing psyche and feelings and sense of moral and ethical reasoning".[52] The *Neighborhood* also spent fewer resources on research than *Sesame Street*, but Rogers used early childhood education concepts taught by his mentor Margaret McFarland, Benjamin Spock, Erik Erikson, and T. Berry Brazelton in his lessons.[53] As the *Washington Post* noted, Rogers taught young children about civility, tolerance, sharing, and self-worth "in a reassuring tone and leisurely cadence".[54] He tackled difficult topics such as the death of a family pet, sibling rivalry, the addition of a newborn into a family, moving and enrolling in a new school, and divorce.[54] For example, he wrote a special segment that dealt with the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy that aired on June 7, 1968, days after the assassination occurred.[55]

According to King, the process of putting each episode of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* together was "painstaking"[56] and Rogers' contribution to the program was "astounding". Rogers wrote and edited all the episodes, played the piano and sang for most of the songs, wrote 200 songs and 13 operas, created all the characters (both puppet and human), played most of the major puppet roles, hosted every episode, and produced and approved every detail of the program.[57] The puppets created for the Neighborhood of Make-Believe "included an extraordinary variety of personalities".[58] They were simple puppets but "complex, complicated, and utterly honest beings".[59] In 1971, Rogers formed Family Communications, Inc. (FCI, now The Fred Rogers Company), to produce the *Neighborhood*, other programs, and non-broadcast materials.[60][61]

In 1975 Rogers stopped producing *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* to focus on adult programming. Reruns of the *Neighborhood* continued to air on PBS.[63] King reports that the decision caught many of his coworkers and supporters "off guard".[64] Rogers continued to confer with McFarland about child development and early childhood education, however.[65] In 1979, after an almost five-year hiatus, Rogers returned to producing the *Neighborhood*; King calls the new version "stronger and more sophisticated than ever".[66] King writes that by the program's second run in the 1980s, it was "such a cultural touchstone that it had inspired numerous parodies",[16] most notably Eddie Murphy's parody on *Saturday Night Live* in the early 1980s.[16]

Rogers and François Clemmons reprising their famous foot bath in 1993. The 1969 scene was a message of inclusion during an era of racial segregation.[62]

Rogers retired from producing the *Neighborhood* in 2001, at the age of 73, although reruns continued to air. He and FCI had been making about two or three weeks of new programs per year for many years, "filling the rest of his time slots from a library of about 300 shows made since 1979".[43] The final original episode of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* aired on August 31, 2001.[67]

Other work and appearances

In 1969, Rogers testified before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Communications, which was chaired by Democratic Senator John Pastore of Rhode Island. President Lyndon Johnson had proposed a $20 million bill for the creation of PBS before he left office, but his successor, Richard Nixon, wanted to cut the funding to $10 million.[68] Even though Rogers was not yet nationally known, he was chosen to testify because of his ability to make persuasive arguments and to connect emotionally with his audience. The clip of Rogers' testimony, which was televised and has since been viewed by millions of people on the internet, helped to secure funding for PBS for many years afterwards.[69][70] According to King, Rogers' testimony was "considered one of the most powerful pieces of testimony ever offered before Congress, and one of the most powerful pieces of video presentation ever filmed".[71] It brought Pastore to tears and also, according to King, has been studied by public relations experts and academics.[71] Congressional funding for PBS increased from $9 million to $22 million.[68] In 1970, Nixon appointed Rogers as chair of the White House Conference on Children and Youth.[72][note 3]

In 1978, while on hiatus from *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, Rogers wrote, produced, and hosted a 30-minute interview program for adults on PBS called *Old Friends ... New Friends.*[74][75] It lasted 20 episodes. Rogers' guests included Hoagy Carmichael, Helen Hayes, Milton Berle, Lorin Hollander, poet Robert Frost's daughter Lesley, and Willie Stargell.[74][76]

Rogers appeared as the first guest on the long-running Soviet children's TV show *Good Night, Little Ones!*, on December 7, 1988, which coincided with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's summit with American president Ronald Reagan in Washington, D.C. The Soviet program's host, Tatiana Vedeneeva, also appeared on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, in a series of episodes about Rogers' visit to the Soviet Union.[77]

In 1994, Rogers wrote, produced, and hosted a special for PBS called *Fred Rogers' Heroes*, which featured interviews and portraits of four people from across the country who were having a positive impact on children and education.[78][79] The first time Rogers appeared on television as an actor, and not himself, was in a 1996 episode of *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*, playing a preacher.[5]

Play media

Rogers testified before the Senate Subcommittee on Communications, chaired by John Pastore, on May 1, 1969. As part of his testimony, he recites the lyrics to "What Do You Do with the Mad that You Feel?"

Rogers gave "scores of interviews".[80] Though reluctant to appear on television talk shows, he would usually "charm the host with his quick wit and ability to ad-lib on a moment's notice".[81] Rogers was "one of the country's most sought-after commencement speakers",[82] making over 150 speeches.[80] His friend and colleague David Newell reported that Rogers would "agonize over a speech",[83] and King reported that Rogers was at his least guarded during his speeches, which were about children, television, education, his view of the world, how to make the world a better place, and his quest for self-knowledge. His tone was quiet and informal but "commanded attention".[80] In many speeches, including the ones he made accepting a Lifetime Achievement Emmy in 1997,[82] for his induction into the Television Hall of Fame in 1999,[84] and his final commencement speech at Dartmouth College in 2002, he instructed his audiences to remain silent and think for 10 seconds about someone who had a good influence on them.[85]

Personal life

Rogers met Sara Joanne Byrd (called "Joanne") from Jacksonville, Florida, while attending Rollins College. They were married in 1952 and remained so for 50 years, until his death in 2003. They had two sons, James and John.[86][87] Joanne was "an accomplished pianist",[88] who like Fred earned a bachelor's from Rollins, and went on to earn a master's degree in music from Florida State University. She performed publicly with her college classmate, Jeannine Morrison, from 1976 to 2008.[88][89] According to biographer Maxwell King, Rogers' close associates said he was "absolutely faithful to his marriage vows".[90]

Rogers was red-green color-blind.[84][91] He became a pescatarian in 1970, after the death of his father, and a vegetarian in the early 1980s,[92] saying he "couldn't eat anything that had a mother".[93] He became a co-owner of *Vegetarian Times* in the mid-1980s[93] and said in one issue, "I love tofu burgers and beets".[94] He told *Vegetarian Times* that he had become a vegetarian for both ethical and health reasons.[94] According to King, Rogers also signed his name to a statement protesting wearing animal furs.[93] Rogers was "a registered Republican", but according to Joanne Rogers, he was "very independent in the way he voted", choosing not to talk about politics because he wanted to be impartial.[95]

Rogers was a Presbyterian, and many of the messages he expressed in *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* were inspired by the core tenets of Christianity. Rogers rarely spoke about his faith on air; he believed that teaching through example was as powerful as preaching. He said, "You don't need to speak overtly about religion in order to get a message across". According to writer Shea Tuttle, Rogers considered his faith a fundamental part of his personality and "called the space between the viewer and the television set 'holy ground'". But despite his strong faith, Rogers struggled with anger, conflict, and self-doubt, especially at the end of his life.[11] He also studied Catholic mysticism, Judaism, Buddhism, and other

faiths and cultures.[93][96] King called him "that unique television star with a real spiritual life",[96] emphasizing the values of patience, reflection, and "silence in a noisy world".[93] King reported that despite Rogers' family's wealth, he cared little about making money, and lived frugally, especially as he and his wife grew older.[97][98] King reported that Rogers' relationship with his young audience was important to him. For example, since hosting *Misterogers* in Canada, he answered every letter sent to him by hand. After *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* began airing in the U.S., the letters increased in volume and he hired staff member and producer Hedda Sharapan to answer them, but he read, edited, and signed each one. King wrote that Rogers saw responding to his viewers' letters as "a pastoral duty of sorts".[99]

The New York Times called Rogers "a dedicated lap-swimmer",[82] and Tom Junod, author of "Can You Say ... Hero?", the 1998 *Esquire* profile of Rogers, said, "Nearly every morning of his life, Mister Rogers has gone swimming".[84] Rogers began swimming when he was a child, at his family's vacation home outside Latrobe, where they owned a pool, and during their winter trips to Florida. King wrote that swimming and playing the piano were "lifelong passions" and that "both gave him a chance to feel capable and in charge of his destiny",[100] and that swimming became "an important part of the strong sense of self-discipline he cultivated". Rogers swam daily at the Pittsburgh Athletic Association, after waking every morning between 4:30 and 5:30 A.M. to pray and to "read the Bible and prepare himself for the day".[101] He did not smoke or drink.[82] According to Junod, he did nothing to change his weight from the 143 pounds he weighed for most of his adult life; by 1998, this also included napping daily, going to bed at 9:30 P.M., and sleeping eight hours per night without interruption. Junod said Rogers saw his weight "as a destiny fulfilled", telling Junod, "the number 143 means 'I love you.' It takes one letter to say 'I' and four letters to say 'love' and three letters to say 'you'".[84]

Death and memorials

After Rogers' retirement in 2001, he remained busy working with FCI, studying religion and spirituality, making public appearances, traveling, and working on a children's media center named after him at Saint Vincent College in Latrobe with Archabbot Douglas Nowicki, chancellor of the college.[102] By the summer of 2002 his chronic stomach pain had become severe enough for him to see a doctor about it, and in October 2002 he was diagnosed with stomach cancer.[103] He delayed treatment until after he served as Grand Marshal of the 2003 Rose Parade, with Art Linkletter and Bill Cosby in January.[104] On January 6, Rogers underwent stomach surgery. He died less than two months later, on February 27, 2003,[105][106] one month before his 75th birthday, at his home in Pittsburgh, with his wife of 50 years, Joanne, at his side. While comatose shortly before his death, he received the last rites of the Catholic Church from Archabbot Nowicki.[107][106] He was survived by his wife, two sons, and three grandsons.[5]

The following day, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* covered Rogers' death on the front page and dedicated an entire section to his death and impact.[106] The newspaper also reported that by noon, the internet "was already full of appreciative pieces" by parents, viewers, producers, and writers.[108] Rogers' death was widely lamented. Most U.S. metropolitan newspapers ran his obituary on their front page, and some dedicated entire sections to coverage of his death.[109] WQED aired programs about Rogers the evening he died; the *Post-Gazette* reported that the ratings for their coverage were three times higher than their normal ratings.[109] That same evening, *Nightline* on ABC broadcast a rerun of a recent interview with Rogers; the program got the highest ratings of the day, beating the February average ratings of *Late Show with David Letterman* and *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*.[109] On March 4, the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed a resolution honoring Rogers sponsored by Representative Mike Doyle from Pennsylvania.[110]

On March 1, 2003, a private funeral was held for Rogers in Unity Chapel, which was restored by Rogers' father, at Unity Cemetery in Latrobe. About 80 relatives, co-workers, and close friends attended the service, which "was planned in great secrecy so that those closest to him could grieve in private".[111] Reverend John McCall, pastor of the Rogers family's church, Sixth Presbyterian Church in Squirrel Hill, gave the homily, and Reverend William Barker, a retired Presbyterian minister who was a "close friend of Mr. Rogers and the voice of Mr. Platypus on his show",[111] read Rogers' favorite Bible passages. Rogers was interred at Unity Cemetery in Latrobe, Pennsylvania in a mausoleum owned by his mother's family.[111][112]

On May 3, 2003, a public memorial was held at Heinz Hall in Pittsburgh. According to the *Post-Gazette*, 2,700 people attended. Violinist Itzhak Perlman, cellist Yo-Yo Ma (via video), and organist Alan Morrison performed in honor of Rogers. Barker officiated the service; also in attendance were Pittsburgh philanthropist Elsie Hillman, former *Good Morning America* host David Hartman, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* author Eric Carle and *Arthur* creator Marc Brown. Businesswoman and philanthropist Teresa Heinz, PBS President Pat Mitchell, and executive director of The Pittsburgh Project Saleem Ghubril gave remarks.[113] Jeff Erlanger, who at the age of 10 appeared on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* in 1981 to explain his electric wheelchair, also spoke.[114] The memorial was broadcast several times on Pittsburgh television stations and websites throughout the day.[115]

Legacy

Marc Brown, creator of another PBS children's show, *Arthur*, considered Rogers both a friend and "a terrific role model for how to use television and the media to be helpful to kids and families".[118] Josh Selig, creator of *Wonder Pets*, credits Rogers with influencing his use of structure and predictability, and his use of music, opera, and originality.[119]

> When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping." To this day, especially in times of "disaster", I remember my mother's words and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers—so many caring people in this world.
> —Fred Rogers[116]
> Whenever a great tragedy strikes—war, famine, mass shootings, or even an outbreak of populist rage—millions of people turn to Fred's messages about life. Then the web is filled with his words and images. With fascinating frequency, his written messages and video clips surge across the internet, reaching hundreds of thousands of people who, confronted with a tough issue or ominous development, open themselves to Rogers' messages of quiet contemplation, of simplicity, of active listening and the practice of human kindness.
> —Rogers biographer Maxwell King[117]

Rogers inspired Angela Santomero, co-creator of the children's television show *Blue's Clues*, to earn a degree in developmental psychology and go into educational television.[120] She and the other producers of *Blue's Clues* used many of Rogers' techniques, such as using child developmental and educational research, and having the host speak directly to the camera and transition to a make-believe world.[121] In 2006, three years after Rogers' death and after the end of production of *Blue's Clues*, the Fred Rogers Company contacted Santomero to create a show that would promote Rogers' legacy.[120] In 2012, *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood*, with characters from and based upon *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, premiered on PBS.[122]

Rogers' style and approach to children's television and early childhood education also "begged to be parodied".[123] Comedian Eddie Murphy parodied *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* on *Saturday Night Live* during the 1980s.[16][124] Rogers told interviewer David Letterman in 1982 that he believed parodies like

Murphy's were done "with kindness in their hearts".[125]

Video of Rogers' 1969 testimony in defense of public programming has experienced a resurgence since 2012, going viral at least twice. It first resurfaced after then presidential candidate Mitt Romney suggested cutting funding for PBS.[126][127] In 2017, video of the testimony again went viral after President Donald Trump proposed defunding several arts-related government programs including PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts.[126][128]

In 2018, *Won't You Be My Neighbor?*, director Morgan Neville's documentary about Rogers' life, grossed over $22 million and became the top-grossing biographical documentary ever produced, the highest-grossing documentary in five years, and the 12th largest-grossing documentary ever produced.[129][130] The 2019 drama film *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood* tells the story of Rogers and his television series, with Tom Hanks portraying Rogers.

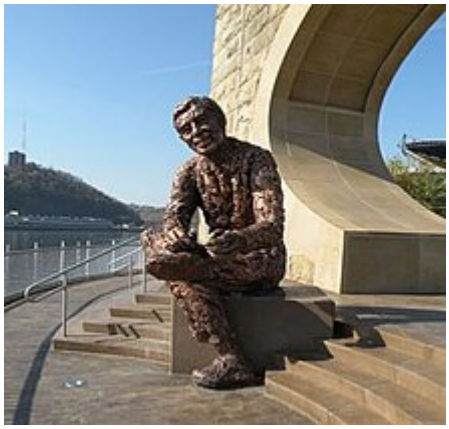
According to Caitlin Gibson of *The Washington Post*, Rogers became a source for parenting advice; she called him "a timeless oracle against a backdrop of ever-shifting parenting philosophies and cultural trends".[129] Robert Thompson of Syracuse University noted that Rogers "took American childhood—and I think Americans in general—through some very turbulent and trying times",[124] from the Vietnam War and the assassination of Robert Kennedy in 1968, to the 9/11 attacks in 2001. According to Asia Simone Burns of National Public Radio, in the years following the end of production on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* in 2001, and his death in 2003, Rogers became "a source of comfort, sometimes in the wake of tragedy".[124] Burns has said Rogers' words of comfort "began circulating on social media"[124] following tragedies such as the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012, the Manchester Arena bombing in Manchester, England in 2017, and the shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida in 2018.

Awards and honors

Year	Honor	Notes	Ref.
1975	Ralph Lowell Award	Given by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting in recognition of "outstanding contributions and achievements to public television".	[131]
1987	Honorary member, Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia	Fraternity for male musicians who have adopted music as a career.	[132]
1991	Pittsburgh Penguins Celebrity Captain	Part of the National Hockey League (NHL)'s 75th anniversary. Rogers was one of 12 celebrity captains to be selected for the 1992 Pro Set Platinum collection.	[133][134]
1992	Peabody Award	Awarded "in recognition of 25 years of beautiful days in the neighborhood".[135]	[136]
1995	National Patron, Delta Omicron	Awarded by the international professional music fraternity, to musicians who have attained "a national reputation in his or her field".[137]	[138]
1999	Television Hall of Fame inductee	Jeff Erlanger appeared during ceremony as a surprise guest.	[139]
2002	Presidential Medal of Freedom	The highest American civilian honor; awarded by President George W. Bush.	[140] [141]
2002	Common Wealth Award	Given by PNC Financial Services, "celebrating the best of human achievement".	[142]
2003	International Astronomical Union asteroid designation	Asteroid 26858 Misterrogers named in Rogers' honor, discovered by Eleanor Helin in 1993.	[143][144]
2008	"Sweater Day"	Tribute to Rogers on what would have been his 80th birthday (March 20), by FCI. People all over the world were encouraged to wear a sweater honoring Rogers' legacy and the final event in a six-day celebration in Pittsburgh.	[145][146]
2015	"Sweater drive"	Rogers honored by the Altoona Curve, a Double-A affiliate of the Pittsburgh Pirates. The team wore commemorative jerseys that featured a printed facsimile of Rogers' cardigan and tie ensemble, and then were auctioned off, with the proceeds going to the local PBS station, WPSU-TV.	[147]
2018	Stamp issued by the U.S. Postal Service	Dedicated on March 23 at WQED.	[148][149]
2018	Google Doodle	In honor of the 51st anniversary of the premiere of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* (September 21). Created in collaboration with Fred Rogers Productions, The Fred Rogers Center, and BixPix Entertainment.	[150][151]

Museum exhibits

- Smithsonian Institution permanent collection. In 1984, Rogers donated one of his sweaters to the Smithsonian.[20][152]
- Children's Museum of Pittsburgh. Exhibit created by Rogers and FCI in 1998. It attracted hundreds of thousand of visitors over 10 years, and included, from *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, one of his sweaters, a pair of his sneakers, original puppets from the program, and photographs of Rogers. The exhibit traveled to children's museums throughout the country for eight years until it was given to the Louisiana Children's Museum in New Orleans as a permanent exhibit, to help them recover from Hurricane Katrina in 2005. In 2007, the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh created a traveling exhibit based on the factory tours featured in episodes of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.[153][154][155]
- Heinz History Center permanent collection (2018). In honor of the 50th anniversary of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* and what would have been Rogers' 90th birthday.[156]



Memorial statue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, created by Robert Berks, opened to the public on November 5, 2009

Rogers being presented the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President George W. Bush in the East Room of the White House on July 9, 2002

Art pieces

There are several pieces of art dedicated to Rogers throughout Pittsburgh, including a 7,000-pound, 11-foot high bronze statue of him in the North Shore neighborhood. In the Oakland neighborhood, his portrait is included in the Martin Luther King Jr. and "Interpretations of Oakland" murals. A statue of a dinosaur titled "Fredasaurus Rex Friday XIII" originally stood in front of the WQED building and as of 2014 stands in front of the building that contains the Fred Rogers Company offices. There is a "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood of Make-Believe" in Idlewild Park and a kiosk of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* artifacts at Pittsburgh International Airport.[157]

Honorary degrees

Rogers has received honorary degrees from over 43 colleges and universities. After 1973, two commemorative quilts, created by two of Rogers' friends and archived at the Fred Rogers Center at St. Vincent College in Latrobe, were made out of the academic hoods he received during the graduation ceremonies.[158][159]

Note: Much of the below list is taken from "Honorary Degrees Awarded to Fred Rogers",[160] unless otherwise stated.

- Thiel College, 1969. Thiel also awards a yearly scholarship named for Rogers.[158]
- Eastern Michigan University, 1973
- Saint Vincent College, 1973
- Christian Theological Seminary, 1973
- Rollins College, 1974
- Yale University, 1974[161]

- University of Pittsburgh, 1976
- Carnegie Mellon University, 1976
- Lafayette College, 1977[162]
- Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 1978
- Waynesburg University, 1978
- Linfield College, 1982[163]
- Slippery Rock State College, 1982[164]
- Duquesne University, 1982
- Washington & Jefferson College, 1984
- University of South Carolina, 1985
- Hobart and William Smith Colleges, 1985
- Bowling Green State University, 1987[165]
- University of Connecticut, 1991[166]
- Boston University, 1992[167]
- Moravian College, 1992[162]
- West Virginia University, 1995[168]
- Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, 1998[169]
- Rider University, 1999[170]
- Marist College, 1999[171]
- Old Dominion University, 2000[172]
- Marquette University, 2001[173]
- Dartmouth College, 2002[159][174]
- Seton Hill University, 2003 (posthumous)[175]
- Union College, 2003 (posthumous)[176]
- Roanoke College, 2003 (posthumous)[159]

Filmography

Television

Year	Title
1954–1961	*The Children's Corner*[177]
1963–1966	*Misterogers*[33]
1964–1967	*Butternut Square*[33]
1968–2001	*Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*[33]
1977–1982	*Christmastime with Mister Rogers*[178]
1978–1981	*Old Friends ... New Friends*[179]
1981	*Sesame Street*[180]
1988	*Good Night, Little Ones!*[181]
1991	*Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego?*
1994	*Mr. Dressup*'s 25th Anniversary
1994	*Fred Rogers' Heroes*[182]
1996	*Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*[183]
1997	*Arthur*[184]
1998	*Wheel of Fortune*[185]
2003	*114th Annual Tournament of Roses Parade*[186]

Published works

Children's books

- *Our Small World* (with Josie Carey, illustrated by Norb Nathanson), 1954, Reed and Witting, OCLC 236163646 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/236163646)
- *The Elves, the Shoemaker, & the Shoemaker's Wife* (illustrated by Richard Hefter), 1973, Small World Enterprises, OCLC 969517 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/969517)
- *The Matter of the Mittens*, 1973, Small World Enterprises, OCLC 983991 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/983991)
- *Speedy Delivery* (illustrated by Richard Hefter), 1973, Hubbard, OCLC 11464480 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/11464480)
- *Henrietta Meets Someone New* (illustrated by Jason Art Studios), 1974, Golden Press, OCLC 950967676 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/950967676)
- *Mister Rogers Talks About*, 1974, Platt & Munk, OCLC 1093164 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1093164)
- *Time to Be Friends*, 1974, Hallmark Cards, OCLC 1694547 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1694547)
- *Everyone is Special* (illustrated by Jason Art Studios), 1975, Western Publishing, OCLC 61280957 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/61280957)
- *Tell Me, Mister Rogers*, 1975, Platt & Munk, OCLC 1525780 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1525780)
- *The Costume Party* (illustrated by Jason Art Studios), 1976, Golden Press, OCLC 3357187 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/3357187)
- *Planet Purple* (illustrated by Dennis Hockerman), 1986, Texas Instruments, ISBN 978-0-89512-092-2

- *If We Were All the Same* (illustrated by Pat Sustendal), 1987, Random House, OCLC 15083194 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/15083194)
- *A Trolley Visit to Make-Believe* (illustrated by Pat Sustendal), 1987, Random House, OCLC 17237650 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/17237650)
- *Wishes Don't Make Things Come True* (illustrated Pat Sustendal), 1987, Random House, OCLC 15196769 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/15196769)
- *No One Can Ever Take Your Place* (illustrated by Pat Sustendal), 1988, Random House, OCLC 990550735 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/990550735)
- *When Monsters Seem Real* (illustrated by Pat Sustendal), 1988, Random House, OCLC 762290817 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/762290817)
- *You Can Never Go Down the Drain* (illustrated by Pat Sustendal), 1988, Random House, ISBN 978-0-394-80430-9
- *The Giving Box* (illustrated by Jennifer Herbert), 2000, Running Press, OCLC 45616325 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/45616325)
- *Good Weather or Not* (with Hedda Bluestone Sharapan, illustrated by James Mellet), 2005, Family Communications, OCLC 31597516 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/31597516)
- *Josephine the Short Neck-Giraffe*, 2006, Family Communications, OCLC 1048459379 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1048459379)
- *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood: The Poetry of Mister Rogers Neighborhood* (illustrated by Luke Flowers), 2009, Quirk Books, OCLC 1042097615 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1042097615)

First Experiences series illustrated by Jim Judkis

- *Going to Day Care*, 1985, Putnam, OCLC 11397421 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/11397421)
- *The New Baby*, 1985, Putnam, OCLC 11470082 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/11470082)
- *Going to the Potty*, 1986, Putnam, OCLC 1123224708 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1123224708)
- *Going to the Doctor*, 1986, Putnam, OCLC 12751383 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/12751383)
- *Making Friends*, 1987, Putnam, OCLC 1016110382 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1016110382)
- *Moving*, 1987, Putnam, OCLC 13526459 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/13526459)
- *Going to the Hospital*, 1988, Putnam, OCLC 16472458 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/16472458)
- *When a Pet Dies*, 1988, Putnam, OCLC 16130718 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/16130718)
- *Going on an Airplane*, 1989, Putnam, OCLC 18589040 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/18589040)
- *Going to the Dentist*, 1989, Putnam, OCLC 17954325 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/17954325)

Let's Talk About It series

- *Going to the Hospital*, 1977, Family Communications, OCLC 11287782 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/11287782)
- *Having an Operation*, 1977, Family Communications, OCLC 11394237 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/11394237)
- *So Many Things To See!*, 1977, Family Communications, OCLC 704507774 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/704507774)

- *Wearing a Cast*, 1977, Family Communications, OCLC 11287804 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/11287804)
- *Adoption*, 1993, Putnam, OCLC 608811678 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/608811678)
- *Divorce*, 1994, Putnam, OCLC 228437876 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/228437876)
- *Extraordinary Friends*, 2000, Putnam, OCLC 40838701 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/40838701)
- *Stepfamilies*, 2001, Putnam, OCLC 35192315 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/35192315)

Songbooks

- *Tomorrow on the Children's Corner* (with Josie Carey, illustrated by Mal Wittman), 1960, Vernon Music Corporation, OCLC 12316162 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/12316162)
- *Mister Rogers' Songbook* (with Johnny Costa, illustrated by Steven Kellogg), 1970, Random House, OCLC 34224058 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/34224058)

Books for adults

- *Mister Rogers Talks to Parents*, 1983, Family Communications, OCLC 704903806 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/704903806)
- *Mister Rogers' Playbook* (with Barry Head, illustrated by Jamie Adams), 1986, Berkley Books, OCLC 1016158916 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1016158916)
- *Mister Rogers Talks with Families About Divorce* (with Clare O'Brien), 1987, Berkley Books, OCLC 229152864 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/229152864)
- *Mister Rogers' How Families Grow* (with Barry Head and Jim Prokell), 1988, Berkley Books, OCLC 20133117 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/20133117)
- *You Are Special: Words of Wisdom from America's Most Beloved Neighbor*, 1994, Penguin Books, OCLC 1007556599 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1007556599)
- *Dear Mister Rogers*, 1996, Penguin Books, OCLC 1084686063 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1084686063)
- *Mister Rogers' Playtime*, 2001, Running Press, OCLC 48118722 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/48118722)
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- *The World According to Mister Rogers*, 2003, Hyperion Books, OCLC 52520625 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/52520625)
- *Life's Journeys According to Mister Rogers*, 2005, Hyperion Books, OCLC 56686439 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/56686439)
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- *Many Ways to Say I Love You: Wisdom For Parents And Children*, 2019, Hachette Books, OCLC 1082231639 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/1082231639)

Discography

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- *Tomorrow on the Children's Corner* (with Josie Carey), 1959[187]
- *King Friday XIII Celebrates*, 1964[188]
- *Won't You Be My Neighbor?*, 1967[189]
- *Let's Be Together Today*, 1968[189]
- *Josephine the Short-Neck Giraffe*, 1969[189]
- *You Are Special*, 1969[189]
- *A Place of Our Own*, 1970[189]
- *Come On and Wake Up*, 1972[190]
- *Growing*, 1992[182]
- *Bedtime*, 1992[190]
- *Won't You Be My Neighbor?* (cassette and book), 1994, Hal Leonard, OCLC 36965578 (https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/36965578)
- *Coming and Going*, 1997[191]

See also

- *Won't You Be My Neighbor?*, 2018 documentary
- *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*, 2019 biographical film
- List of vegetarians

Notes

1. According to *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* producer Hedda Sharapan, Rogers used television to communicate his message;[16] David Newell, who played Mr. McFeely on the *Neighborhood*, said, "Television was a vehicle for Fred, to reach children and families; it was sort of a necessary evil".[17]
2. See Wolfe, pp. 9–16 for a complete description of the structure of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.
3. See American Rhetoric.com for the transcript of Rogers' testimony.[73]

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